DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 274 195 FL 016 063

AUTHOR Rado, Marta; Foster, Lois
TITLE The Language Environment of Children with a Non-English Speaking Background.
PUB DATE May 86
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Ethnicity and Multiculturalism National Research Conference (Melbourne, Australia, May 14-16, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English (Second Language); *Family Life; Foreign Countries; *Interlanguage; Language Proficiency; *Language Role; *Limited English Speaking; *Parent Child Relationship; Primary Education; Young Children

ABSTRACT

A study comparing some grammatical and discourse features of the language of native-English-speaking and non-native-English-speaking parents of primary school children found that those children whose parents address them in interlanguage of English, frequently the case when the parent has not achieved native fluency, often need to repair the language of their parents in various ways in order to make it intelligible. Features examined include alternation between native language and interlanguage English, number of words used in utterances, fillers, routine utterances, connectives, error patterns, message restoration, and omissions. Social, linguistic, and educational implications are discussed. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED274195

THE LANGUAGE ENVIRONMENT OF CHILDREN WITH A NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND

Dr. Marta Rado and Dr. Lois Foster

La Trobe University

Paper presented at Ethnicity and Multiculturalism National Research Conference, Melbourne. May 14-16, 1986.

FL 016063

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Dr. Marta Rado

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ABSTRACT

This is part of a study which aims at examining some grammatical and discourse features of the language of primary school children of English and non-English speaking background, their parents and teachers. The paper reports on some features of the language of parents whose mother tongue is not English from the point of view of the hearer. It endeavours to show that NES children whose parents address them in 'interlanguage' of English (and this is frequently the case) need to repair the language of their parents in various ways in order to make it intelligible. Interlanguage is the language of the second language learner who has not achieved native-speaker competence. Some of the social, linguistic and educational implications of this situation are explored.

INTRODUCTION

Children with a non-English speaking background often find it difficult to keep pace in the classroom with their Anglo-Australian peers. The disadvantage they may suffer is often marginal/subtle. For example, many of them successfully complete their secondary education and enter various tertiary institutions. However, they seem to obtain lower ratings in their examination results. There is a fair consensus of opinion that it is their competence in English that holds them back, consequently increasing attention is being paid to developing appropriate English language curricula for students with a non-English-speaking background.

Since language learning and use are interactive processes, the availablity of information on the language environment of the children with a non-English speaking background is essential for formulating educational policies and programs for them. Some aspects of this environment have already been explored, for example, Marjoribanks, 1979; Smolicz, 1979; Clyne, 1982; Foster, Rado, Rowley, 1980; Foster, Rado, Lewis, 1983. Others are in the process of being investigated. The areas that have been documented include patterns of language use in inter- and extra- family situations and some of the characteristics of the speech of parents of a non-English speaking background who were not born in Australia. It appears that many of these parents, irrespective of length of residence in Australia, speak in '<u>interlanguage</u>', namely a language which displays unpredictable idiosyncratic features and does not fully conform to the rules of mother tongue speakers of English, be they of working class or middle class background.

The Study

The data for this paper have been drawn from a databank established as the result of a continuing study of the language environment of children of non-English speaking background. The data are being subjected to a range of sociolinguistic analyses (see Rado and Foster, 1985a, 1985b, 1985c); the particular focus for this paper is the <u>hearer's perspective on interlanguage</u>.

There are various reasons why one should want to explore conversations in English with NES (Non-English-speaking) and ES (English-speaking) parents. The task children face in interpreting what their parents say may have implications for how they themselves handle language. That is, in this study, we are interested in studying parent language from the <u>hearer's</u> perspective. Such a perspective is important also for the following reasons:

*Schools have certain expectations with respect to the linguistic development children bring to school based on long-standing experience with ES background children.

*Parents as significant adults might influence the language use of their children.

*In many NES migrant homes English is used by adults some of the time.

*Hearers are active participants in conversations in that they understand their partners because of the conceptual, linguistic and pragmatic pre-knowledge they bring to the verbal exchange.

*Hearer's preknowledge raises expectations. Fulfilled expectations facilitate comprehension whereas foiled expectations increase the processing load.

The continuing study involves the collection of language samples from selected NES and ES children of primary age and their parents. Modes of data collection include face-to-face interviewing of children, parents and school principals and the application of specially designed materials to elicit language which children complete under supervision. These materials require children to respond to and use both oral and written language. Information collected from school principals and teachers provides background on the school context and academic achievement and social development of the NES children and their matched ES peers.

The linguistic analyses involved in this type of research are extremely complex and time-consuming. For practical reasons, in the studies to date, we have selected small numbers for our samples but have concentrated on intensive techniques to collect detailed information on selected aspects of discourse. For the present analysis, 8 pairs of students were the subjects. There were sixteen parents in total in the interview. Where both parents participated, in general, one parent was the dominant contributor. The students were found in three schools, hence, there were three interviews with principals. The NES children came from family backgrounds in which Italian, Greek and Macedonian were spoken in the home.

The data from NES and ES parents were treated in the following way:

The protocols were divided into ten topic areas, eight of these were shared by both NES and ES parents. They were: 1) personal data (e.g. schooling); 2) attitude to migrant and Australian customs/lifestyles; 3) language use outside the home; 4) attitudes to language maintenance/bilingualism; 5) importance of education; 6) child's leisure activities; 7) appraisal of the contribution of immigrants to Australia and LOTE learning; 8) suggestions for improving the quality of life in Australia. Two additional topics discussed with NES parents were: 9) early experiences in Australia; 10) plans to settle in Australia or return to country of origin. Additional questions discussed with ES parents were: 9) helping their child with English expression; 10) attitudes to personal contact with migrants.

From each topic area, the first five clauses were selected for analysis. This was done because they formed a connected text. The total number of clauses examined for each interview was 50 giving a group total of 400. It was also felt that the immediate reaction to a topic raised by the interviewer would be the most relevant.

Linguistic framework for the analysis.

For the purposes of the paper, it might be useful to subdivide linguistic competence into grammatical, semantic or lexical, and pragmatic or language use knowledge. It must be recognised, however, that these categories overlap.

As stated above, it is assumed that if hearers are familiar with these three aspects of language and the context of situation, then interpreting a verbal message is relatively easy. In other words, the processing load is such that it does not divert attention from the content of the message, provided that speakers adhere to the established system of the language used. If speakers deviate from the system, that is, use it idiosyncratically, the processing load may increase with the nature, density, and context of the deviance until there is a complete breakdown in communication. So comprehensibility is not a clear-cut issue but should be viewed as shifting backwards and forwards on a continuum between total comprehension and total incomprehension as speakers' utterances vary in deviance from conventional use. NES background children exposed to interlanguage English in the home may be faced with language at times which makes inordinate demands on their processing capacity in that it is difficult or impossible to interpret accurately.

This is not to say that mother-tongue speakers of English do not utter deviant sequences but it is assumed that these are less frequent and of a kind that is easier to interpret. All ES parents, interviewed in this study made some errors. The NES parents spoke an 'interlanguage' in that they used an idiosyncratic language system in contrast to the shared system of a language. What is important to note about interlanguage is that it is a partly unshared system.

By means of interviewing, NES parents' reasons for alternating between their mother tongue and interlanguage English were documented. The reasons can be summarised as follows:

Mother Tongue	Interlanguage English
. ease of expression	. children English dominant
. language matches conceptual level	. children often respond in English
. sentimental attachment	. children mostly use English with each other
. cultural heritage/pride	. learn English from children
. friendship network	. non-mother-tongue speaker present
. family reasons	. to reinforce the message
. for the benefits of bilingualism	. children refuse to accept mother tongue

When communicating with their own parents, migrant children might find themselves in a difficult situation irrespective of the language used. If the language is the parents' mother tongue, the children as hearers may not be sufficiently competent to fully understand it. If the language is English, the messages may be impaired because the parents are not sufficently competent.

An immediate response might be to teach the children the family language and the parents, English. A further response might be to tune the teaching of English more accurately to the needs of the children. If such

fine tuning is to be carried out, a great deal of detailed information is required about the children's English language environment and the effect this might have on pre-adolescent language use.

Before reporting on the results of the study, it may be useful to say a few words about the nature of language comprehension. Understanding language is generally regarded as an active process which entails assigning meaning to an utterance on the basis of the hearers' linguistic and pragmatic knowledge. (For example see Carroll 1972 and Bever 1972). Such a description presupposes that the utterance is grammatical and both semantically and pragmatically acceptable. However, what is of interest in this discussion is the hearer's reaction to impaired messages such as often occurs in interlanguage. The effects are probably similar to those of acoustically degraded messages, that is, messages that are not clearly audible. Carroll points out that such utterances are often understood as well, or nearly as well, as unimpaired messages. But their interpretation on the basis of the wider context or linguistic redundancy may be 'merely probable rather than certain' (Carroll, 1972:13). It is also important to note that generally the absence of explicit marking adds to the complexity of the processing task e.g. the absence of relative clause markers (Bever, 1972:105). It is therefore highly probable that the absence or substitution of grammatical markers with deviant forms also increases the processing load.

A comparison of the speech of NES and ES parents should yield information on the processing task faced by their children. This was done by selecting a certain number of grammatical, semantic and pragmatic features. In other words, the parents' replies to the interview questions were rated acceptable or unacceptable on whether they were grammatically well formed, whether the words selected were semantically appropriate and whether the utterance was appropriate in the given context.

A reasonable expectation with respect to communicative or global competence is that both native and interlanguage speakers irrespective of their competence make performance errors. In the case of native speakers, this can be ascribed to fatigue, distraction and a number of other causes. In the case of interlanguage speakers, there is the additional likelihood of lack of familiarity with the language system. What is of interest then is the difference between the speech of NES and ES parents in the frequency and nature of errors made.

The unit chosen for analysis was the clause as this can be regarded as the primary perception unit in speech processing (see Bever, 1972:104).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion is designed to document some of the differences between hearer tasks when listening to NES and ES parents respectively.

Verbal Output of NES and ES Parents: A pragmatic presepctive

Table 1

Verbal Output of NES and ES Parents

NES Parent clauses n = 400 - Individual clause n = 50
ES Parent clauses n = 400 - Individual clause n = 50

	Words			Fillers			Routines		
	f	Average per person	Average per clause	f	Average per person	% of no. of words	f	Average per person	%
NES	2225	278	6	102	13	5	14	2	0.6
ES	3036	380	8	196	25	6	165	21	5.0

A comparison of the speech of NES and ES parents shows that NES parents used fewer words in the course of uttering 50 clauses each. As a group, the ES parents uttered 27 percent more words. Calculated on the basis of average words per clause for each individual, it can be seen in Table 1 that ES parents used eight words compared with the six words of NES parents. If the clause is regarded as the basic perceptual unit or chunk, then the question arises what significance should one attach to the fact that the NES parent chunks are shorter. One can speculate that brevity in certain instances goes hand in hand with reduced factual or pragmatic information so that a greater number of clauses are required for the transmission of comparable information. Another possible interpretation is that the information content is in fact reduced with the possibility that it is recoverable from the textual or situational context. But, of course, there is also the possibility that some information which was origninally intended as part of the message has been lost because it was not signalled semantico-grammatically. In the latter instance, the hearer can be regarded as the loser.

Routines

Since we are concerned here with pragmatic as well as factual information a closer scrutiny of the nature of the word strings associated with or integrated in the clauses as the case may be is also of interest. The label routine has been chosen to cover all types of stereotyped words or phrases totally or practically predetermined 'covering the full range of utterances which acquire conventional significance, for an individual, group or whole culture' (Hymes cited in Coulmas, 1981:4) (For a discussion on types of routines, see Coulmas, 1981: 1-17.) For the purposes of this discussion, fillers were considered separately from other types of routines. Words or expressions were classified as fillers if their sole function was to fill a gap giving the speaker time to plan the next verbal sequence and giving the hearer extra processing time. Where an expression also had a communicative function (and such is the case when "I think" is used to emphasise the speaker's personal opinion), the expression was not classified as a filler. Typical fillers were "I think" and "you know". ES parents

used a greater variety of fillers than NES parents, but both groups used a similar proportion relative to the total number of words (NES 5% vs ES 6%). In this respect, the lightening of the hearer's processing load was similar.

Coulmas explains the widespread use of routines as follows:

> ..... man says the same thing a number of times not because he is a tedious bore. It happens because man has socially shared intentions stimulated to a great extent by contexts of situation which recur and so does linguistic expression because it is economical, functionally required and satisfactory.
>
> (1981:67)

Generally it can be said that a sub-category of routines Keller calls gambits provide a semantic frame but do not convey a specific meaning. (Keller, 1981: 107) They can function as semantic introducers (e.g. a topic can be framed in terms of personal opinion "My personal opinion is", "I honestly believe" or "I would imagine"). They can signal the special context in terms of turn-taking signals or as indications of the speaker's social role. Typical of the former are expressions of wanting to abandon a turn e.g. "That's all". Further, they can indicate a person's state of consciousness, that is readiness to receive or provide new information, opinions or emotions, suggesting that some knowledge or concern is being shared "I didn't think that"; "That's a different question".

The above can serve as an illustration of some of the variety of functions wholly or partially prefabricated chunks can fulfill. In fact there is now growing evidence that in order to achieve native-like fluency, speakers must make extensive use of such sequences (see Peters, 1983:3). In fact Peters maintains that it is a shortcutting device: 'It saves processing time and effort, allowing the speaker to focus attention elsewhere, for instance, on the social (as opposed to the linguistic) aspects of interaction' (1983:3). In view of the usefulness of routines and the important role they play in first language acquisition according to Peters, it is interesting to note that five percent of the total verbal output of the ES parents were classified as belonging to gambits whereas that of NES parents was under one percent (0.6). Moreover, every ES parent used several gambits. In the case of NES parents, four gambits were recorded in all.

If NES parents don't avail themselves of routines, they increase the processing load of their children, because the verbal material to be analysed is denser. Routines can be treated as 'big' words not needing analysis. Further, the children miss an opportunity in experiencing the way social relations and discourse features can be indicated thus adding a further dimension of language. In other words, they miss out on witnessing how language can be enriched. Routines are available as an option. There are no hard and fast rules that govern their use, they are acquired in the course of the socialising process.

Connectives

Another area where speakers have considerable choice is in the use of connectives. English has a variety of linguistic means for making the connection between clauses, explicitly to fill the gap between clauses or to mark the boundary between them. Connectives help the listener to track relations between events while providing extra planning time for the speaker. Gap fillers and boundary markers also lighten the planning/processing task by diluting information density. At the same time, they help to maintain the impression of fluency. Although they are not essential for the intelligibility of a text, their very existence and variety is significant.

There are two overlapping systems expressing relations between clauses. One is the grammatical system of subordination and coordination. The other is the semantic system of connecting clauses 'logically' to their context (see Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 226-273). The 'logical' conjunctions identified in the parent protocols were categorised according to Martin (1983:21) illustrated here with examples from the protocols. The list of examples is not complete.

Additive: and, or;
Temporal: when, before;
Consequential: but, because;
Comparative: whereas.

In addition, Halliday and Hasan's 'continuative' category was also used. (Halliday and Hasan, 1976: 267-271). Parents used connectives from all five categories. There was a noticeable difference, however, in frequency of use. Table 2 shows that forty three percent of ES parent clauses were introduced by a connective compared with 27 percent of NES parent clauses. Table 2a shows the rank order of connectives for both groups, five for the NES and six for the ES parents, chosen on the basis that they introduced over two percent of the clauses uttered. The four types of logical conjunctions are represented in both lists by the same conjunctions. In addition the ES parents frequently used the continuative 'well' which occurs typically at the beginning of a response in a dialogue or introduces an explanatory comment (Halliday and Hasan, 1976:269). In sum, it is a discourse marker but not meaningful per se.

Table 2

Connectives

Clauses n = 400

	f	%	Average
NES	106	27	13
ES	172	43	22

Table 2a

Rank Order of the Most Frequent Connectives

NES Connectives n = 106	f	%	ES Connectives n = 172	f	%
but (adversative)	24	23	and (additive)	41	24
because (consequential: causal)	24	23	well (continuative)	20	12
and (additive)	20	19	because (consequential: causal)	18	11
if (consequential: conditional)	14	13	but (adversative)	18	11
when (temporal)	10	9	if (consequential: conditonal)	14	8
			when (temporal)	10	6

It is important to remember that linking devices are speaker options so they cannot be judged on the basis of right or wrong. It is not always necessary to signal logical and structural relations but to do so helps the listener to the extent to which explicit marking lightens the processing load. If one considers connectives in parent speech as place holders indicating to their children that a connection needs to be made, they may well direct non-conscious attention to these signals. If their importance is appreciated, this may facilitate the comprehension of expository prose, the discourse genre many NES background children find difficult to understand.

Errors in Parent Speech: An acceptability perspective

The fifty clauses per parent selected for analysis were rated acceptable, unacceptable and dubious/anomalous on the basis of their grammatical, semantic and pragmatic appropriateness. The dubious category was introduced because judging the well-formedness of clauses is not always a clear-cut matter (see Quirk and Svartvik, 1966). For the purpose of this discussion, the dubious category was merged with the faulty one.

Table 3

NES and ES Parent Faulty Clauses

Clauses n = 400

Parents	Faulty Clauses			Faulty Verb Groups		
	f	%	Average	f	%	Average
NES	264	66	33	168	42	21
ES	45	11	6	27	60	3

Tables 3a

NES and ES Parent Faulty Verb Groups

Faulty NES Clauses n = 264
Faulty ES Clauses n = 45

	f	%
NES	168	64
ES	27	60

As indicated in Table 3, the frequency of faulty ES parent clauses is dramatically lower than that of NES parent clauses: approximately one-tenth versus two-thirds. If we accept the view that scarcity of errors implies a lighter processing load and greater accuracy in comprehension for the hearer, then it can be asserted that the ES children have a much easier processing task than the NES children when talking English with their parents.

As can be seen in Table 3a, faulty clauses in turn were categorised in terms of repair complexity. Complexity refers here to the straightforwardness of the repair required. In other words, was there a single likely interpretation or were there multiple interpretations, hence repair options, or was the clause incomprehensible, and so not repairable? Accordingly, the rating scale adopted was single, multiple and impossible. Significantly, there were only two ES parent clauses where the manner of repair was in doubt. These were incomplete utterances without sufficient contextual clues to restore them. In contrast, one fifth of the total of NES parent clauses (approximately one-third of faulty clauses) could have been repaired in several ways or were impossible to repair. Clearly, choice and uncertainty in repair further increase the processing load of faulty clauses. In fact, it is impossible to interpret such clauses accurately. (For message restoration in NES parent speech, see Table 4.)

Besides the global assessment of errors, the verb group (VG) was selected for special study on the basis of its centrality in the clause (for example, see Chafe 1970). Lyons (1977:435) states that 'In certain systems of syntactic analysis, the verb is taken to be the pivot upon which all other constituents of the sentence-nucleus depend and by which they are determined.'

The aspects of the VG studied were concord, the verb 'be', tense, the negative, modals, semantic fit, the verb construction 'have got' and omissions. Table 5 displays the rank order of errors calculated on the basis of faulty clauses.

Table 4

NES Message Restoration

Restoration	Clauses n = 400 %		Faulty clauses n = 264 %	
Single	46		70	
Multiple	8)		12)	
Impossible	12)	20	18)	30

Types of errors will be discussed following the rank order of NES parent mistakes.

Table 5

Rank Order of Verb Group Errors

Total of VG Errors per Clause:

NES Parents n = 168	f	%	ES Parents n = 45	f	%
Tense	70	42	Be	8	30)
Omission	56	33	Have got	8	30)
Be	40	24	Omission	3	11
Negative)	14	24)	Tense	2	7)
Lexical)	14	24)	Modal	2	7)
Modal	10	16	Negative)	0	0)
Have got	8	5	Lexical)	0	0)

Tense

The absence or faulty tense marking of the finite verb in the clause accounted for somewhat less than half of all errors. The errors took the predictable unmarked or dictionary entry form of the verb which in English has a timeless or omniptemporal flavour and in most contexts therefore is misleading. Quirk and Greenbaum state that 'tense is a universal, non-linguistic concept with three divisions: past, present and future; by 'tense' we understand the correspondence between a form of the verb and the concept of time (1973:40)'. However, Lyons points out that tense is not necessarily an inflectional category of the verb although it is an empirical fact 'that tense like person, is commonly, though not universally realised in the morphological variations of the verb in languages. Semantically, however, tense is a category of the sentence' (1977:678). Lyons adds that 'it is probably true to say that all languages have various deictic adverbs or particles of time, comparable with the English words 'now', 'then', 'recently', 'soon', 'today', 'yesterday', etc., which provide the means, when it is necessary or desirable, for drawing deictic temporal distinctions of the kind that are obligatory and grammaticalized in the fullest sense of

tense-distinction, in such languages as English.' Lyons concludes 'that the deictic frame of temporal reference is basic and essential to language' (p.679).

In those languages which have tense, it 'grammaticalizes the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero point of the deictic context' (Lyons, 1977:678); in other words, the time of the utterance.

Because spatio-temporal reference is an essential part of the communication system (for further detail, see Lyons 1977), the non-marking of temporal reference must constitute a serious impediment for the hearer. It requires additional contextual search which might be textual or extra linguistic. Compare, "I come here in 1955" where the date places the event clearly in the past, with "I learn some French". In the latter case, the information that the learning of French refers to the speaker's past, and not present school learning experience, is not explicitly stated in this or any previous clause but must be deduced from the fact that she is no longer at school. Clearly, the failure to mark tense does not increase the processing load in an equal measure. Perhaps it can be viewed as a role reversal between speaker and hearer. Instead of the speaker pointing to something in the intersubjective experience of common memory of speaker and addressee, it is the latter who has to do the pointing, retain the time reference in consciousness or create it anew as the case may be.

Whereas tense repair in the NES parent speech placed a serious burden on the hearer, there were only two instances where ES parent speech required tense repair. So tense does not seem to be a problem for native speakers.

Omission

Generally omissions tend to occur in interlanguage in every part of a clause. Here we are discussing the verb group only and, within that group, specifically lexical verb and the auxiliaries but not the verb 'be' and the modal auxiliary. These omissions will be discussed under separate categories.

Lexical verb omissions can lead to various interpretations. Compare - "Sometimes help mother too but if she have a bit of break always - television." The omitted verb is obviously "watches". No other verb comes immediately to mind.

In the next example several alternatives present themselves for clause completion. "The one thing more brains - the clever is". Possible completions include the following: "..the more brains she has.."; "..the more her brain is developed.."; and the most probable in the context "..the more she learns.."; which amount to a total rephrasing of the clause.

Because of the centrality of the verb in the clause, its meaning must be fully restored if effective communication is to take place. Undoubtedly such restoration is not usually part of the hearer's task and constitutes another instance of <u>overloading</u> and at times <u>meaning impairment</u> in the form of <u>uncertainty</u> or even <u>incomprehension</u>.

Be

The verb 'be' is often omitted in non-standard English, for example, in Black English or in other lower socio-economic varieties. NES parents tended to omit the verb 'be', irrespective of whether it was an auxiliary or lexical verb and whether it was in the present or future tense. One quarter of their verb group errors were of this nature. ES parents also omitted the verb 'be' occasionally, one third of their errors belonged to this type. As a rule repairing such omissions is not a problem. For example:

"I ask what she done, what she doing."
"(There is) more chance to get a job here."

Although easy to repair, the omission of the verb 'be' foils expectations and, to that extent, constitutes a processing load for the hearer.

Lexical Confusion: Wrong Verb Choice

Lexical confusion, namely the wrong choice of a word, in this case the lexical verb can lead to vagueness in comprehension as several modes of restoration might offer themselves. Some of these might involve additions to the clause rather than substitution with a verb that uniquely fits the context. The analysis of the NES parent protocols revealed that verb meaning restoration was often not straightforward in that a choice had to be made among several likely candidates. Further restoration often involved changes in syntax.

In the following clause the verb can be uniquely restored.
Example:

Deviant clause: "They learn each other."
Restored clause: "They teach each other."

However, clause restoration is not always clear-cut. Often there is more than one possible replacement.

Example:

Deviant clause: "Here can do better life."
Restored alternative clauses: (a) "Here I can have a better life."
(b) "Here I can lead a better life."

The difference in meaning is not significant. This, however, is not always the case.

Example:

Deviant clause: "They can more languages the better for them."
Alternative restorations: (a) "If they know more languages the better for them."
(b) "If they can learn more languages the better for them."

These two clauses are similar in meaning but they are not identical. There is some possibility of incorrect interpretation leading to

misunderstanding. The seriousness of the misunderstanding of the communicative act will depend on the context of the situation.

In some instances the range of possible modes of restoration is considerable.

Example:

Deviant clause: "The school is to learn the people".
Possible restored clauses: (a) "The school is here to teach people."
(b) "The school should teach people."
(c) "The school serves to teach people."
(d) "The function of the school is to teach people."

The list is not exhaustive.

Sometimes semantic repair is impossible or a pure guess.

Example:

Deviant clause in answer to a question about liking Italian festivities:

"Yes, well I get quite all right."

Whether the speaker meant 'like' or 'keep' or some other verb cannot be uniquely determined.

Negation

Negation is complicated in English. It takes several forms. It can be marked in the verb group but alternatively also by a negative word (e.g. never) so that each positive sentence has two negative equivalents, one containing a negative verb construction, the other a positive one but associated with a negative word. (e.g. "He sometimes visits us", versus "He does not ever visit us", or "He never visits us", Quirk, 1973:376-77). Here we will be concerned with the verb group only. Within that category there are again two modes of marking the negative. In the post auxiliary position, 'not' or its contracted form 'n't' is inserted. If there is no auxiliary, the 'dummy' verb 'do' is inserted. Particularly the latter poses a problem for interlanguage speakers as it is purely a carrier of tense and has no other semantic content. Grammatical elements that don't make obvious sense are difficult to learn (see Slobin, 1973). Even at the stage where these NES parents used negative verb groups with a correct internal structure, they also used negative sentences with a pre-posed unintegrated 'no' or 'not'. Such negation violates the rules of standard English and hence hearer expectations. It can be understood but some finer shades of information relating to the scope of the negation might be lost. In English, the position of the negating element indicates whether it refers to the whole clause or some part of it. Unintegrated negation might not do this.

The negative accounted for over one-tenth of verb group errors in NES parent speech. In contrast there were no deviant negative forms identified in ES parent speech.

Here is a typical example of pre-posed negation:
"They no go to primary school."

Modal Auxiliaries

It is in the verb group that English often signals whether a statement is true or false, in other words hypothetical. The latter is frequently expressed with the help of modal auxiliaries. These indicate the scale of likelihood ranging from certainty to improbability and so play an important role in distinguishing fact from non-fact. (Leech and Svartvik, 1975: 124-155). Besides referring to reality and belief they also express emotions and attitudes. In this way they play a role in emotive emphasis, in influencing people, and in polite communication.

Clearly these are aspects of language that play an important role in social interaction.

Utterances in which a modal was required by the context were a similar proportion of the clauses for both groups (10 percent). Every occurrence of these in the ES parent speech was acceptable. In NES parent speech, there was a five percent realisation of modals, in another five percent of cases where the modal would have been obligatory, it was not lexicalised. In four percent of cases, accurate repair was not possible.

An example of modal auxiliary omission: "So, that's what I like to be changed in Australia.." instead of "I would like."

The following is a similar example and is included here because it shows how the context can help the interpretation of an utterance. The repairs are shown in brackets.

Question: "Would you like your children to speak Italian when they grow up?"
NES parent answer: "I (would) like (them) to speak Italian."

Modal auxiliaries are another instance where NES parent speech is less informative with respect to the more subtle aspects of language. There is no suggestion that these parents lack the concepts under discussion but, by not indicating them explicitly, their children listening to their English miss out on having them reinforced. But even if such reinforcement does not play a significant role, the fact that hearer repair work has to be done remains important.

Have Got

There is also the informal 'have got', where 'have' is constructed as an auxiliary and 'got' is a past participle. This expression, is frequently preferred as an alternative to 'have' (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973:36) 'Have' has four reduced realisations (i.e. /iz/, /z/, /s/ and /v/.) These are unstressed and often blend with the following sound, therefore are barely audible. It is not surprising then that even native speakers tend not to produce it. There were 8 occurrences of nonstandard "got" form in the NES parent speech.

The omission of 'have' in this context may not interfere much with comprehension. At times, it could perhaps be confused with 'got to' meaning 'must' as in:

"They got a property but they got to work."

Interlanguage Variability

One of the difficulties facing interlanguage listeners is its variability in that standard forms alternate with deviant ones. This adds to the unpredictability of interlanguage. Although it has been argued that interlanguage is systematic (for example see Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1981), the system used is idiosyncratic and unstable making it difficult to discover its systematicity in the course of everyday listening as opposed to analysis based on transcripts. Regular exposure to apparently unsystematic language may be misleading in that it may give the impression that the system is not important. It is certainly a drawback in the understanding of expository prose if the listener/reader pays less attention to the system on which it is based.

The variability of NES parent language can be illustrated by a simple example.

"They married there, they stay there."

Note that both clauses contain a regular verb. The first one has a past tense ending, the second one should have it too but was omitted.

Anomalous Clauses

In the course of analysing NES parent interlanguage, it became evident that the restoration of impaired clauses is a demanding task even if the impairment is located in a single word involving a single grammatical, semantic or pragmatic notion. The cumulative effect of impairment can lead to communication breakdown when there are a number of such incomprehensible sequences. The ES parent anomalous clauses could not be understood because they were incomplete. The parent digressed or changed the topic before finishing the clause. The NES parent clauses on the other hand were incomprehensible because they were incoherent.

Example: "When I come bigger here there was a young lady here, Italian all right, everything."

CONCLUSION

The analysis informing this paper is only a beginning. As yet, there is little material of this kind available for the Australian context. Much more work will have to be done if we are to understand the full implications of migrant children's home language environment. However, the results of our linguistic analyses, including the present one, are suggestive of considerations which need to be addressed in the social and educational spheres. Two of the implications are as follows.

There is evidence that English language programs for adults are both under-funded and under-utilized. There has not been as much innovation in the use of mass media for language teaching, in providing on-site courses in industry, in successfully mounting schemes to meet the needs of women at home as might be expected some forty years after the introduction of large scale immigration programs. Hence, it is known that there are many long-standing residents of Australia, as well as new arrivals, who have only

limited competence in English. The small scale studies we have conducted provide an indication of the nature of the limitations on English language competence. It is important that more opportunities are available for adults of non-English speaking background to learn English. But it is of equal importance that we know which aspects of English are more difficult to learn so that appropriate programs can be devised.

Further, we have suggested in another research report (Rado, Foster and Bradley, 1984) that schools may need to consider the family rather than the individual child as the teaching unit. If schools had data on specific aspects of English in which NES parents and their children were limited, they may be able to set up activities which involve both parents and children and help to overcome these limitations. Many schools already have good liaison with NES parents because of the services of ethnic teacher aides. There are drop-in centres at schools and activities at schools in which parents can share. What we are suggesting is simply another step in a continuing program. The activities we have indicated need not be restricted to NES parents. ES parents are interested also in new methods and curricula in schools. They may well be interested also in learning more about the formal and pragmatic aspects of the English language.

Let us remind ourselves of the tasks facing conversation partners.

> Just as the speaker presumably performs the processing operations of planning and execution simultaneously during much of speech production, it seems that the listener is often similarly engaged in recovering and predicting information simultaneously.
> (Cooper and Paccia-Cooper, 1980:214)

Clearly the listening task is complex. Adding recovery and prediction difficulties renders it even more so. One can therefore only marvel at the children with NES background who, nevertheless, manage to interpret their parents' language. These children deserve admiration. They also deserve support in the form of language teaching in the family language and English. Such teaching should aim at developing the children's capacity for recovery and prediction. All children would profit from such an approach. In the course of this discussion, the attempt was made to identify certain areas that deserve attention, such as routines and connectives in discourse and the verb group in grammar. The emphasis on discourse and language use points to the exploration of the social aspects of language.

The details of the teaching points and the methodology to be adopted will have to be worked out in some detail. One aspect that could be included in the language curriculum is linguistic awareness. Techniques adopted here might be the judging of communicative appropriateness. Teachers for all children, that is NES and ES alike, could be prepared through in-service courses or the dissemination of suitable materials. There is a great need to enable teachers to build up an extensive and varied repertoire of ideas, skills and diagnostic measures if they are to have a truly professional approach to the teaching of language. NES children will still have a considerable burden in that they need to learn the family language as well as English. It should be noted, however, that many proponents of multicultural education advocate the exposure of all children to the learning of at least one language other than their mother tongue (Rado, 1984). Our research has included the study of the language

environment of ES peers as well not just to enable comparison with their NES peers, but to understand their language environment too as something of linguistic and educational interest in itself.

REFERENCES

Bever, T.G. Perceptions, Thought and Language. In Carroll, J.B. & Freedle, R.O. (eds) Language Comprehension and the Acquisition of Knowledge. Washington, DC: V.H. Winston and Sons, 1972.

Carroll, J.B. Defining Language Comprehension: Some Speculations. In Carroll, J.B. & Freedle, R.O. (eds) Language Comprehension and the Acquisition of Knowledge. Washington, DC: V.H. Winston and Sons, 1972.

Carroll, J.B. and Freedle, R.O. (eds) Language Comprehension and the Acquisition of Knowledge. Washington, DC: V.H. Winston and Sons, 1972.

Chafe, W.L. Meaning and Structure of Language. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Clyne, M. Multilingualism in Australia. Melbourne: River Seine Publications, 1982.

Cooper, E.W. and Paccia-Cooper, J. Syntax and Speech. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1980.

Corder, S.P. Error Analysis and Interlanguage. London: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Coulmas, F. (ed) Conversational Routine. The Hague: Mouton, 1981.

Foster, L., Rado, M. & Bradley, D. English Language Needs of Migrant and Refugee Youth. La Trobe University, 1982. Mimeo.

Foster, L., Rado, M. and Lewis, R. Factors Contributing to Language Development and Learning of Children in Australia with a Non-English Speaking Background. La Trobe University, 1983. Mimeo.

Foster, L., Rado, M. and Rowley, G. Evaluation of Factors Associated with Success in Bilingual Education. La Trobe University, 1980. Mimeo.

Halliday, M.A.K. and Hasan, R. Cohesion in English. London: Longman, 1976.

Johnston, M. Syntactic and Morphological Progressions in Learner English. Canberra: Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, 1985.

Keller, E. Gambits: Conversational Strategy Signals. In Coulmas, F. (ed) Conversational Routine. The Hague: Mouton, 1981.

Leech, G. and Svartvick, J. A Communicative Grammar of English. London: Longman, 1975.

Lyons, J. Semantics Vol.2 London: Cambridge U.P., 1977.

Marjoribanks, K. Ethnicity, Family Environment, School Attitudes and Academic Achievement. The Australian Journal of Education, 22(3): 1978, pp.38-45.

Martin, J.R. The Development of Register. In Fine, J. and Freedle, R.O. (eds) Developmental Issues in Discourse. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1983.

Peters, A. M. The Units of Language Acquisition. Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1983.

Quirk, R. and Greenbaum, S. A University Grammar of English. London: Longman, 1973.

Quirk, R. and Svartvik, J. Investigating Linguistic Acceptability. The Hague: Mouton, 1966.

Quirk, R., Greenbaum, S., Leech, G. and Svartvik, J. A Grammar of Contemporary English. London: Longman, 1973.

Rado, M. Teaching in the Multilingual Classroom. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre, 1984.

Rado, M. and Foster, L. Migrant Children's Language, Parental and Peer Language Environment and their Implications in the Australian Intercultural Context. Australian Review of Applied Linguistics, 9(1): 1986, 62-91.

Rado, M. and Foster, L. Text Building Devices in Intercultural Conversations. Paper delivered at the Australian Universities Language and Literature Association 23rd Congress, Melbourne 1985.

Rado, M. and Foster, L. The Language of Migrant Parents and their Children: An Interlanguage Perspective. Paper delivered at the Australian Association of Speech and Hearing Annual Conference, Melbourne 1985.

Selinker, L. Interlanguage. IRAL (International Review of Applied Linguistics), 10(3): 1972, 209-231.

Slobin, D. Cognitive Prerequisites for the Development of Grammar. In Ferguson, C.A. and Slobin, D.I. (eds) Studies of Child Language Development. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973.

Smolicz, J. Culture and Education in a Plural Society. Canberra: Curriculum Development Centre, 1979.